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ABSTRACT

While all professional fields, taken for granted in a developed society, are underpopulated in underdeveloped American Indian communities, there is a widespread negative attitude toward academic professionals among Indian leaders today. The attitude may reflect a national and, perhaps, a world trend in increasingly technological and conservative political economies. However, Indian scholars are needed (1) to build stable and academically viable Native American Studies programs in universities to generate badly needed research and parallel courses within all the social science/humanities disciplines; (2) to educate the non-Indian majority in universities so future American leaders are not ignorant of Indian communities and issues; and (3) to use their academic skills in administering tribal programs. Tribal policy makers should encourage higher education and professional formation by undertaking tribal needs assessment; basing higher education funding and counseling on realities of the Indian community; working closely with existing Native American Studies programs to encourage meeting tribal needs; pressuring universities to develop "hard funded" Indian academic programs in curriculum development and research and student support services; providing information to council members, community leaders, and the general Indian population on university education; and encouraging Indian youth to pursue terminal degrees in their field of interest. (NEC)

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Developing Indian Academic Professionals

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Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz

"Of what use is a sociologist, anthropologist, political scientist, or historian to an Indian Tribe today? The Navajo Nation needs engineers, doctors, businessmen, and teachers desperately to achieve self-determination, and that is what we encourage you to prepare for." (From a speech by Chairman Peter MacDonald, Navajo Nation, November, 1978, University of New Mexico.)

Chairman MacDonald's juxtaposition of technological, business and teacher training against scholarly formation for Indians gives rise to many questions which cannot be answered precisely, but which require close analysis. Given the alarming statistics reflecting the low educational level and commensurate poor social conditions of American Indians in the United States, such questions are not merely academic.

Bare survival has dominated Indian goals in the 20th century. Tribal societies, land and resources, and populations were shattered and scattered under the steamroller of European and United States' colonialism, leaving remnants of formerly integrated and prosperous human communities. Though survival is not assured in the minds of most Indian people today, the drive toward development and what some have termed, "nation building," have come to be seen by many as the best assurance for survival.

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All professional fields, easily taken for granted in a developed society, are underpopulated in underdeveloped Indian communities. With bare resources, including a limited number of Indian people available for professional training, the ordering of priorities is essential. In the transition from the distortions inherent in an underdeveloped community to a well-balanced society, overproduction in certain areas and skewing are probably necessary. Of course, the order of priorities depends upon the particular Indian reservation or Indian group concerned. Undoubtedly, the Navajo Nation needs engineers, if it chooses industrial development which has been forced upon its people. Reservations need business development if they are to close the money leakage to off-reservation merchants. Indian communities need educators if they are to control their educational systems. Indian reservations need agronomists and veterinarians, managers, planners, doctors, nurses and lawyers.

So who needs humanist and social scientist scholars-academics? What is a Ph.D. good for? As reflected in Chairman MacDonald's statement, there is a negative attitude toward academic professionals among Indian leaders today. Partly, the negative attitude toward scholarly pursuits reflects a national, and, perhaps, a world trend in increasingly technological and conservative political economies. The humanities or liberal arts, such as history, literature and philosophy, in particular, are regarded as superfluous and impractical. These academic disciplines, as well as doctoral study in all the social sciences and humanities, are most closely associated with voluminous reading and writing in an age oriented toward visual and electronic learning and expression. Therefore, if affluent societies are questioning the value of persons of letters, certainly Indians must question allowing for such luxury in their situation of deprivation, emergency, and poverty.

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The preceding comments would seem to indicate an easy answer. At this particular time, Indian professional scholars, even if they were desirable in a balanced situation, which is questionable, are not essential for Indian development, and all effort should be made to produce professional Indian educators, businessmen and technocrats. But, perhaps, the situation is not so simple.

As a context for further discussion, it should be recalled that a century ago, in another age of "Indian reform," it was said that Indian people needed training in farming and the skilled crafts. Similarly, Africans just freed from slavery in the United States were urged to learn such trades, opening the very instructive debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. Little debate ensued among Indians and only a handful of Indian academic professionals may be counted in the 20th century. Indians, blacks, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have been systematically excluded from the "Halls of Ivy" in the United States.

There are many mitigating factors which dissuade Indian students from becoming professional scholars besides being discouraged by the larger society and by tribal officials. Contemporary Indian college students are generally the first in their families to go beyond high school graduation. There is little knowledge in Indian communities of the University system and its linkages with the socioeconomic fabric of American society. Indian counselors, recruiters and career advisers, who aid Indian students in choosing a university and their course of study, themselves, do not usually have the background to provide a full picture to the Indian student. Non-Indian counselors often discourage Indian students from pursuing academic fields which lead to graduate study when they see the deficiencies in math, science and the English language from which most Indian students suffer. Further "special programs" have been created for Indians in some universities. Those which provide preparation for a regular course of study, such as the American Indian Law Center at the University of New Mexico, are to be distinguished from those which establish a specially-designed curriculum and degree program, such as many of the Ph.D. programs in colleges of education, and the various B.A. and M.A. programs in Native American Studies. Finally, most tribal leaders and tribal and BIA officials who give direction to Indian students, through the allocation of funds, do not come from a scholarly perspective, nor do most of the

leaders in Indian education organizations.

No one questions the fact that American Indian students must receive their higher education in established universities of this country, and most people see Native American Studies programs as important linkages for Indian students. The prerequisite for university teaching, however, is a Ph.D. except in rare cases of renowned artists and writers. The principal reason for the instability of Native American Studies programs in universities is the lack of qualified Indian faculty to develop academically viable curricula and research. Even when the qualities exist in native American personnel, in absence of the qualifications, that is, the Ph.D. and publications, the programs flounder in instability because the unqualified faculty remain part-time or temporary and are eventually phased out in the retention, promotion, and tenure procedures of the university. The few programs which have stabilized with tenured faculty are often under great pressure to provide student and community support services rather than research, research training, scholarly publications, and an academic curriculum.

Clearly, American Indian university students are confused about their course of study. At the University of New Mexico, where 1,300 Indian students are enrolled (1979-80), 50 percent are in "university college," with majors undeclared or have non-degree status. The annual dropout rate for Indian students is also 50 percent. There is a prevailing tendency, often required by funding guidelines, to direct counseling and tutorial services to the students least likely to continue, that is, to those who are failing or drifting, rather than to develop, encourage and raise the academic capability of those who are passing.

Indian students are particularly sensitive to the historical process of attempted acculturation via the American educational system, and rightly, are skeptical about the motives of an American university from the outset. The social sciences and humanities appear more offensive because of their value orientation and outright racism, despite their claims to objectivity. However, the technological, medical, business, and education fields are no less value-laden, though the values are presented more subtly, perhaps. All fields in American universities neglect Indian values. But, is the American university the appropriate vehicle through which to learn one's own cultural values? Rather, a profession is to be gained into which different values may be infused by the individual. That is, what is to be learned are methods, methodologies and mastery of the field. Mastery does not mean acceptance of values. No one doubts that an Indian civil engineer might adapt his skills to the design of appropriate highways and bridges for his reservation. Nor should there be any doubt that an Indian historian, anthropologist or economist might adapt his professional training to another situation. Again, Native American Studies Centers have the opportunity to provide the vital linkages between university education and the Indian situation which the student so badly needs in order not to get discouraged or "lost."

There are many indications that Indian communities and governments do need professional scholars. They are particularly needed in this transition period in order to build stable and academically viable Native American Studies programs in universities. Native American Studies should play a crucial dual role in a university. First, such programs should generate badly needed research and parallel courses within all the social science and humanities disciplines. Secondly, Native American Studies is essential for educating the non-Indian majority in the university, so that these future American leaders are not ignorant of Indian communities and issues.

Not only are Indian scholars needed to build Native American Studies, but they may also be essential for the nation-building process of Indian tribes. There is no reason why a Ph.D. in economics or political science or history cannot administrate a school or tribal program, just as well as one trained in educational administration, public administration, or business administration. Administrative skills, like teaching skills, may be acquired without formal training. However, the ability to analyze and assess problems, issues and data within an historical and larger socioeconomic context requires substantial reading, research, writing, discussion, and the acquired ability to assimilate and analyze information. The person who suc-

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cessfully completes a doctorate in a social science or humanities discipline, to a greater or lesser extent, acquires that ability. Such is not the case for technical training.

Perhaps there is a reversal of needs assessment in the conclusion that technically skilled professionals are most needed at the present time in Indian communities. In order to reach the goal of economic well being, policymaking and political choices may be more crucial than the ability to operate all the machinery. That is, engineers, lawyers, negotiators, systems operators, technicians, and, to a lesser extent, teachers and health workers, may be hired to carry out particular technical functions. However, political decisions must be made by Indian leaders who are capable of assessing and expressing the goals or, as well as, in turn, politically educating, the community. Does an education in engineering or administration provide the Indian person with the political and reasoning skills necessary to develop leadership abilities?

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If the above arguments have merit, then the directions of Indian higher education requires some rethinking, for if Indian scholars are essential, then Indian communities are experiencing a serious crisis hitherto largely ignored. There are only a handful of Indian scholars and few Indian students who consider the liberal arts doctorate as a viable alternative. At the present time it is practically impossible to develop Native American Studies programs as academic units in universities because there are no available Indian Ph.D.'s to fill faculty positions in the arts and sciences, and little prospect that there will be if the present situation and set of attitudes continues to prevail.

Though there is most certainly the need for Indian academic programs to be "integrated" within the entire university community, that is, not isolated and merely a window dressing for "affirmative action," it is also essential that Indian university programs develop their own guidelines and perspectives. In career advisement, for instance, too often the national "market" is the referential context for directing Indian students. The job possibilities for a liberal arts Ph.D. in the United States today, and probably for the next decade at least, is nil. In particular, history and English Ph.D.'s simply have no job possibilities, it is said. Therefore, the career guidance counselor will usually warn the Indian undergraduate to avoid such overpopulated fields. However, faculty slots may be created for Indian scholars in these fields. Ninety-five percent of all university permanent faculty in the arts and sciences in major United States universities are Anglo-American, and if Indian scholars were available, faculty positions could be created for them. Further, the social science or humanities Ph.D. need not lead only to university teaching. The national job market assessment is based on one career objective for such a Ph.D., and that is, university teaching or administration. Further, most tribal government and Indian program professional positions are open to any higher education background.

A career analysis of tribal governments and Indian programs, however, does not exist. "Market" analysis and projections for the future are desperately needed, as well as thorough inventories of human resources now available for Indian programs. Again, though, a framework for such data is necessary for it to be meaningful. Definitive pronouncements are made by Indian leaders and "experts" with little analytical or statistical basis.

The following programmatic suggestions for tribal policymakers in relation to higher education and professional formation are offered:

Undertake a tribal needs assessment with future projections.

Base higher education funding and counseling on the realities of Indian communities, not on national realities.

Work closely with existing Native American Studies programs in universities to encourage them to meet tribal needs first.

Pressure universities to develop "hard funded" (university budget) Indian academic programs in curriculum development and research and student support services. Unlike the public elementary and secondary schools, "soft" funding is disastrous as the basis for a university program. Federal and foundation funding should be supplement.

Provide information to council members, community leaders and the general Indian population on university education and degrees, including time and financial factors and expected results.

Encourage Indian young people to pursue substantial education (terminal degrees—Ph.D., M.D., J.D.) in the field of their interest, that is, to pursue what is exciting and interesting to them, not just what might seem to be the most immediately useful. They will ultimately be more useful as fully-developed, confident human beings, than simply cogs in a wheel of technocracy. Encourage the development of thinking and expressive abilities.

University Native American Studies programs have far greater potential than is usually recognized for the formation of Indian professionals. Such programs vary considerably from university to university, and none have existed long enough to declare failure or success. All are still in the formative stages, but probably need reassessment at this stage. In assessing their future development, several considerations should dominate. In no case should they be assessed in terms of termination for they are useful and functional with great potential.

A Native American Studies program should fit into the existing university structure. That structure is a product of centuries of western traditions and has become universalized in this century. Whatever its defects, its structure is not going to change soon, nor is it the purpose of Indian people to change the American university in the order of priorities. The Native American Studies program should be viable within the existing structure, assuming, of course, that racism and discrimination are not essentials to the university structure and may be broken down. Native American Studies need not fit into all parts of a structure which includes research, instruction, administration, student services, and for tax-based universities, also includes community outreach. Native American Studies programs need not all be alike, but whatever their emphasis, they should be linked into the appropriate structural unit of the university system. Each Native American Studies program should be designed in relation to its goals. Just as a particular university is not all things to all people, neither should a Native American Studies program be all things to all Indian people.

Presently, a certain form of specialization in emerging which has great potential for the development of Native American Studies programs in universities across the continent. In the California university system, three major programs exist—UC Berkeley and UC Davis offer academic degrees in Native American Studies as well as using adjunct faculty. UCLA American Indian Studies is a research unit within the university which produces a quarterly journal and scholarly publications, as well as promoting research by offering research fellowships. AIS-UCLA does not offer courses but rather recruits Indian faculty for departmental appointments who then serve as advisors for the Center. Native American Studies programs in the mountain and plains states approximate the UC Berkeley and Davis model, but have greater numbers of Indian students. The University of New Mexico Native American Studies Center is more regionally oriented with direct linkages to the local tribal governments, emphasizing regional research projects, publications and curriculum development. Many other state university programs emphasize student support services, such as the University of Colorado. The University of Arizona houses a number of tribal-financed programs in the field of education, but also has begun a Native American Studies program specializing in political skills for tribal leaders within the Political Science Department. The smaller, private universities, such as Dartmouth, Stanford, and Harvard have developed potentially excellent programs. All the programs uniformly lack qualified Indian faculty.

An assessment of these programs is needed for future planning. Given the present economic situation which limits university growth in the United States, it is very important that specialized Native American Studies programs complement one another rather than overlap. It is also essential that the Indian student by given all the options available. In all cases, more attention must be paid to retention and promotion of excellence in Indian university students rather than mere numerical recruitment.

Finally, we must return to the necessity for analyzing the Indian situation and assessing goals to clarify the educational needs and the methods of developing Indian academic professionals. Policy is formulated on particular political perspectives and there will be variance

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within tribes, among individuals, and these will change at various stages of development in time. If it is determined that Indian scholars are needed now, how then do we go about developing the Indian scholar?

Most of us who have managed to become scholars directly trace that success to one or two individual professors who worked with us, encouraged us, and challenged us.

In the European and American university tradition, which has been universalized, there is a certain one-to-one formation of the scholar. The "mentor-disciple" relationship in the western scholarly tradition does not differ substantially in form from the Indian tradition in education. Nor are they necessarily as contradictory as they are often portrayed. Just as a person may be fluent in more than one language, they may have a number of sources of knowledge without ending in "dualism" or schizophrenia. Indian scholars are badly needed for the kind of one-to-one relationships required for the formation of Indian scholars. "Role-models" are useful for inspiring the Indian student, but do not replace the actual presence of the teacher. Lacking the Indian scholars to fill the mentor roles in the university, it should be a particular mission of Native American Studies program to identify non-Indian teachers for Indian students to work with. In part, identification includes a sensitizing process for the non-Indian scholar. Most of us who have managed to become scholars directly trace that success to one or two individual professors who worked with us, encouraged us, and challenged us. Education is not a mechanical process, though great parts of it may be mechanized. The ability to argue, debate, analyze, substantiate, and challenge existing ideas and interpretations of data is terribly important for the formation of Indian scholars, much more important than digesting information.

Limited as they are, the Native American Studies program and the Indian faculty in universities are key to developing Indian professional scholars. A sense of this mission could work apparent "miracles" in the transformation of Indian "higher education" from mechanical mass production to excellence.

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